

The Friends of the Coyote Valley Greenbelt (FROG)

P. O. Box 7665 San Jose CA 95150-7665

The Greenbelt is now part reality and part dream...our mission is to realize the dream.

December 8, 2004

Honorable Mayor Ron Gonzales
Co-Chair Forrest Williams
Coyote Valley Specific Plan Task Force
San Jose City Hall
801 North First Street
San Jose CA 95110

Dear Task Force members

My letter is to introduce to you the Friends of the Coyote Valley Greenbelt - Friends of the Greenbelt, or FROGs for short. Our purpose is to advocate for a true, permanent, sustainable Greenbelt in the South Coyote Valley...as adopted by Morgan Hill, San Jose, and Santa Clara County.

I enclose FROG's Mission and Positions. Among our positions, we strongly support the Santa Clara County Open Space Authority's Vision for the Coyote Valley Greenbelt. Their statement to your Task Force, together with Santa Clara County's "Coyote Valley Greenbelt: Preliminary Planning Principles", is the most articulate current description of the Greenbelt. We also urge adequate funding to support the purchase of lands in the Greenbelt from willing sellers. Purchase of some lands in the Greenbelt is the only way to insure that it becomes permanent.

We have sent our positions to San Jose's consultants for their use in preparing a Greenbelt proposal. Their preliminary presentations have appeared to address some of our concerns. We will review the Greenbelt proposal in the light of our positions.

In September, I addressed the Council in support of your Task Force's progress report on behalf of the Friends of the Coyote Valley Greenbelt, or FROG. I have joined FROG because of my commitment to see a true Greenbelt created in the area designated in our San Jose General Plan.

I co-chaired the General Plan Task Force that drafted our General Plan while on the City Council. Before my two Council terms, I served on the City Planning Commission. I believe that my experience prepares me to address the Greenbelt in a special way. FROG includes other members who also have experience in public policy and environmental management, as well as concerned members of the general public.

Lastly, I urge you to allow enough time for the community and the property owners to review and comment on the consultants' Greenbelt proposal before your Task Force acts on it.

Sincerely


Trixie Johnson

Enclosures:

Friends of the Coyote Valley Greenbelt: Our Mission and Positions
Santa Clara County Open Space Authority: Greenbelt Vision
Santa Clara County: Coyote Valley Greenbelt Preliminary Planning Principles

Friends of the Coyote Valley Greenbelt: Our Positions

- 1. The Friends of the Coyote Valley Greenbelt (FROG) support the creation of the Coyote Valley Greenbelt as a unique, rural agricultural place of countywide importance that will also protect water resources and natural habitat.**

In time and with proper support, the Greenbelt will become a regional asset. It can become the type of place that magazines like "Sunset" feature as a place to visit.

- 2. We support the policies of San Jose, the County, and Morgan Hill that identify the Greenbelt to be maintained at the south end of the Coyote Valley.**

The policies define the Greenbelt as an agricultural, rural buffer separating San Jose's projected Coyote Valley development and the City of Morgan Hill. These are long-standing policies, in place for decades. The San Jose City Council recently reaffirmed them in its instructions to the Coyote Valley Specific Plan Task Force now preparing the Specific Plan.

The designated Greenbelt area includes the area west of Monterey Road and south of Palm Avenue and the eastern area between Monterey Road and the freeway north to Metcalf Road, including the Coyote River Park Chain.

- 3. We support the following policy documents which further define the Coyote Valley Greenbelt:**

The Santa Clara County Open Space Authority: Greenbelt Vision. The Authority Board adopted the Vision as input to San Jose's Coyote Valley Specific Plan program for developing the North-Mid Coyote Valley area. (See copy of Open Space Authority Coyote Valley Greenbelt Vision.)

The "Coyote Valley Greenbelt: Preliminary Planning Principles". The Cities of San Jose and Morgan Hill and the County of Santa Clara have accepted this policy document.

The "Recommended Conservation Goals for the Coyote Valley Greenbelt". This is included in the "Santa Clara County Conservation Priorities Plan, Phase II", prepared for the Land Trust for Santa Clara County, August 15, 2001. (See copy of this extract.)

Our following positions supplement these policy documents.

- 4. We support protection of the hillsides surrounding Coyote Valley as the natural setting for the Coyote Valley community and the Greenbelt.**
- 5. We support the expansion of sustainable agriculture and related rural activities in the Greenbelt.**

The Greenbelt can become a center for specialty crop sustainable agriculture serving the South Bay Area and beyond as a source for specialty food markets, restaurants, and companies providing food services to Silicon Valley employers. It can enrich the lives of residents by providing a variety of vegetables, fruits and food products for direct sale at the farm and in farmers' markets in the area. It can provide educational and recreational experiences to families visiting the farms and to schools that set up programs to integrate food science and nutrition into their curriculum. It could include programs to promote seasonal rural events such as pumpkin patches, agri-tourism, even including bed-and-breakfast accommodations. (A consultant is now preparing feasible proposals for promoting a variety of sustainable agriculture and related activities in the Greenbelt. We await them.)

While some property owners say that agriculture is infeasible in the area and that the parcels are too small for agriculture, there is a demand for these "small" lots for agriculture. California FarmLink is a non-profit organization that acts as a broker between land owners seeking to sell or lease their land and farmers looking for farm land to buy or lease. This organization has a back-log of farmers seeking parcels of these sizes for small scale intensive farming of specialty crops. (See California FarmLink brochure)

Large scale facilities for public assembly are not compatible with the variety of rural activities envisioned for the Greenbelt.

6. We support consistent, cooperative long-term policy and program support by the agencies that share jurisdictional responsibilities in the Greenbelt.

The City of San Jose, Santa Clara County, and the Santa Clara Valley Water District, as well as other agencies, each has jurisdictional responsibilities in the Greenbelt area. The Greenbelt will take time to reach its full potential, and consistent support will be required for its full realization.

7. We support a combination of funding to make the Greenbelt permanent.

Funds from the mitigation of Coyote Valley agricultural land lost to development should be combined with funds from other sources to purchase lands to make them permanently available for farming. Purchases of land for farming or habitat and hillside protection may be in fee or conservation easements.

The purchase of lands within the Greenbelt should be directed to strategic areas to accomplish a viable pattern of agriculture, as envisioned by the Open Space Authority, and to implement the objectives of the "Preliminary Planning Principles". This should include lands east of Monterey Road to augment the Coyote River Park Chain.

8. We support some recreation in the Greenbelt, with different emphasis in the two Greenbelt areas.

East of Monterey Road, north to Metcalf Road, emphasis should be on augmenting the Coyote Park Chain to assure its capacity to serve the large population in the region and, at the same time, protect its natural, riparian habitat resources for vegetation and wildlife. In the area west of Monterey Road, south of Palm Avenue, recreation areas should be limited to passive recreation, rather than organized sports, with no night time illumination. Interaction with agricultural activities and events will be recreational. Multi-use trails and pathways should connect the urban areas to the Greenbelt and the Coyote Park Chain and link the Santa Cruz Mountains, Western Hillside, Coyote Ridge and the Diablo Range.

9. We support including the existing rural residences in the Greenbelt.

There are a number of residences built on smaller lots (around 2 1/2 acres). However, there should be no further small rural residential lot divisions. Also, the construction of additional houses on existing lots should be controlled by rigorous standards relating to ground water protection and drainage, limiting septic effluent and runoff from impervious surfaces. Also, design standards should maintain the rural character.

Conclusion

The City Council has directed that the Coyote Valley Specific Plan produce a new kind of community. We understand that to be one that embodies "smart growth" and the "new urbanism" to produce a vibrant urban community that is livable and exciting, one that combines "mixed uses" with highly effective public transportation to reduce use of the private automobile. This is the opportunity to create a new type of urbanism that will be of statewide significance...a model for how the state can meet the challenge of growth without destroying the quality of life that makes living here worthwhile.

In the same measure, we have the opportunity to create the Greenbelt...one that will show how rural, agricultural life can be sustained at the urban edge, as distinct from ever-expanding urban development invading ever-retreating agriculture.

It is critical that the plan for Coyote development identify the methods and the means for creating the Coyote Greenbelt. The time to do it is now.

Friends of the Coyote Valley Greenbelt: Our Mission

The Friends of the Coyote Valley Greenbelt, or FROGs, is a newly-formed organization with the core membership of individuals having years of experience in community and public service related to land use planning, environmental protection, public policy and open space preservation. FROG members believe we need good land use planning for creating a livable and sustainable community that will benefit the largest number of people now and for the future.

The purpose of this organization is to ensure that the area identified as the Coyote Valley Greenbelt is neither forgotten nor compromised, especially while the City of San Jose plans development of the North-Mid Coyote Valley. The Greenbelt is the area south of Palm Avenue and the area east of Monterey Road north to Metcalf Road, including the Coyote River Park Chain, as designated in the San Jose General Plan.

We are "stakeholders" because we live in San Jose and other communities near the Greenbelt and in the nearby Bay Area. We recognize the need for a strong, pragmatic voice advocating for the creation of a permanent Greenbelt to serve as a buffer between the City of San Jose and the City of Morgan Hill, an area now largely under the jurisdiction of Santa Clara County.

The FROG vision is a greenbelt that will provide the greatest benefit for the largest number of people throughout the region. To accomplish that vision, we will monitor current and future planning affecting the Greenbelt; we will educate the larger public about Greenbelt issues; and we will encourage preparation and implementation of plans for the Greenbelt that support multiple purposes.

Our Vision for the Coyote Valley Greenbelt

Plans and programs for the Greenbelt that will:

- delineate a permanent rural buffer between San Jose and Morgan Hill
- protect aquifers and natural resources while providing for flood control
- provide for passive recreational uses such as hiking and biking
- provide linkages between new and existing trails and open space
- contribute to the quality of life for urban neighborhoods throughout the region, as well as integrate them with the resources and amenities of the Greenbelt
- celebrate our agricultural heritage and provide opportunity for small-scale sustainable agriculture
- protect, enhance and contribute to the ecological values of riparian areas as well as habitats for native plants and biological species, and be consistent with a Habitat Conservation Plan, now being prepared
- continue to provide a desirable rural residential community lifestyle for those who live in the Greenbelt

Our Projected Activities

To realize the vision the Friends of the Coyote Valley Greenbelt will:

- monitor the current Specific Plan process for urban development of the North and Mid-Coyote Valley and its impact on the Coyote Valley Greenbelt to assure that the Specific Plan will support implementation of the Greenbelt. In particular, FROG will assess the environmental and financial planning aspects of the Specific Plan.
- speak to and correspond with key decision-makers, appropriate agencies and organizations.
- support appropriate funding for acquisition and programs to implement and enhance the Greenbelt
- encourage the Cities, County, other agencies, and organizations to participate in activities that support implementation of a true Greenbelt.

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